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# Officers and Directors

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down from the \$65,000 originally issued in 1900 to \$22,500 by 1951.

The postwar era saw the death of C. J. Seeds, the oldest officer on the road, who had served as treasurer or auditor continuously for forty-four years. His careful, methodical records were a delight to his fellow officers; and, although totally deaf, Seeds was one of the ablest on the management team. His successor was W. W. Matthews, cashier of the Farmers & Merchants Savings Bank and son of Lafayette Matthews, the county treasurer, who had served as the road's secretary for two decades. The other officers consisted of Vice President C. J. Hockaday, who headed the Delaware County Farm Mutual Insurance Company, Charles W. McCormick, partner in Stearns and McCormick's furniture store across the street from the depot, and F. B. Wilson, insurance agent and secretary of the school board. All except Matthews had been with the road a dozen years or more and were familiar with its problems.

President Carr prided himself on the road's personalized operation or, as he termed it, "service à la carte." When shippers had a car loaded and ready to roll they phoned the depot and No. 6 headed out of the enginehouse and highballed the shipment to Oneida. To meet competition of trucks, a pick-up-and-delivery service was instituted before World War II. It became increasingly obvious, however, that the line was fighting



a losing battle. Due to changing conditions, the daily freight service to Oneida over the Great Western had dwindled to a weekly local. What was the virtue of the M & O's tailor-made operation if a shipment lay over at the junction for several days? It was recorded that a carload of paper billed from Des Moines took exactly five weeks to arrive at Manchester. In contrast, a truck might back up to a loading dock in the morning and deliver its cargo anywhere up to 250 miles away by the next day. Slowly, yet inexorably, the "back door" to Manchester was closing.

Changes in the economic picture also militated against the railroad. When oil largely took the place of coal, it was piped to a nearby point and trucked to its destination. All these changes had come about slowly, yet the war's end brought them into full focus.

In 1945, C. J. Boardway, after thirty-eight years of railroading, took his well-earned retirement. He remained on the board (to which he had been elected in 1942), however; and retained a lively interest in the road. His place was filled by George B. Tesmer, the M & O's agent at Manchester who had formerly been with the Milwaukee Road.

The unfortunate purchase of engine No. 7, a powerful Mogul, from the Baltimore & Ohio did not help the M & O. Bought to assist No. 6, the 2-6-0 proved to be too heavy for the track.



That meant the sturdy "American" had to bear the burden alone. Its partner, the lanky No. 5, had previously been scrapped.

Fortunately, the road did not have to go to the expense of sending the veteran engine to Oelwein when it needed repairs, for they, in a sense, brought "Oelwein" to location. It had been the practice in later years to have the Great Western send engine parts by truck to Manchester. With the help of the CGW's machinist, Joseph Peters, and its boilermaker, Joseph DeTimmerman, the repair job was done in Manchester's own back yard. The two Joes came on weekends, when not on duty, and overhauled M & O's motive power at nominal cost.

Repairing the "American" was analogous to overhauling a Model T Ford today. By 1951 only two of the nation's railroads, the Chicago & Illinois Midland and the Huntington & Broad Top Mountain (Pennsylvania) featured this type of locomotive in regular passenger service. Even in freight operation there were few extant. The little Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic on Maryland's "Eastern Shore" retained one or two, California's Stockton Terminal & Eastern another, and perhaps a half dozen more were gingerly shunting freight cars on grass-grown short lines.

Because of its rare and venerable motive power, the M & O attracted railroad fans and steam locomotive connoisseurs from all over America. Being



easily accessible from Chicago, with direct service on the Illinois Central, small groups might decamp, camera in hand, to observe the workings of the storied Manchester & Oneida. Often the amused short-liners would let hobbyists ride in the cab; and some fans have been known to try their hands at the throttle and Johnson bar. Among the better-known railroad historians and engine picture collectors were M. C. Poor and Dan K. Peterson, whose photos are reproduced herein. Engine No. 6 is also pictorially embalmed for the benefit of posterity in Lucius Beebe's *Mixed Train Daily*.

Sentiment, however, is a thing apart from the hard facts of a workaday existence. The M & O had been gently slipping into the red until 1946, when it plummeted. That year it rolled up a net deficit of \$10,014. Succeeding years all showed deficits, curtailed operation and down-to-the-bone economizing. But it was no use. The road which had never defaulted on an obligation, never missed a bond payment, never sought solace in Section 77-B of the bankruptcy act, never been sold, reorganized or operated by a receiver, now called it quits.

The decision to abandon the road was made in the Carr law office, where the board and managing committee meetings had been held virtually since its inception. In the library on the second floor of the Victorian brick building, the directors



held a special meeting on April 16, 1951. A report was submitted which stated that the M & O "has not shown a profit for several years and that there is . . . a large deficit annually. Limited service offered by the connecting lines at Oneida renders it improbable that this road can be operated at a profit in the foreseeable future. It was, therefore, the considered opinion of the Directors that steps be taken to discontinue the operation of the Road." On a motion by Director T. H. Tracey, seconded by Auditor W. W. Matthews, President Carr was authorized "to take the necessary legal action to discontinue the business and liquidate the property of the Road."

It was a truly sad meeting. Overtly everything seemed the same. The rows of law books going back to the Massachusetts reports of 1804 and ending with the then current *North Western Reporter*, lined the shelves surrounding the board table. There, too, were the familiar bound volumes of *Harper's*, commencing with Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1850, and continuing to 1904. Behind the two-story building the meandering Maquoketa lazily flowed toward the Mississippi. Looking out the back windows the directors could see the M & O depot. But there were no quips from President Carr; Director Boardway kept strictly to the subject at hand, that of bringing the records up to date and of analyzing his findings. Even Secretary McCormick found no cause to smile.



At a subsequent stockholders meeting on June 1, it was unanimously voted to wind up the business of the corporation, pay all bills, and distribute the assets to the stockholders.

The matter of paying all bills was scrupulously followed by President Carr. As he put it, in answering a query regarding the disposal of the railroad: "I am now engaged at trying to do as good a job in taking it apart as my father and his friends did in putting it together."

Sealed bids were solicited for the rolling stock and other equipment, to be opened at 10 a.m. on November 2, 1951. Of the six bidders, the \$55,000 offer of the Hyman-Michaels Company of Chicago was the highest. It was accepted. There was even an inquiry from Walt Disney Productions looking toward the purchase of the rolling stock and rails, but it arrived too late.

Permission having been received by the ICC and state regulatory authorities to terminate service, the last scheduled train ran on December 1, 1951. On that day about 1,500 people gathered at the depot to mark the closing ceremonies. The principal speaker was Hobart Cooley who recalled how as a boy he had put "nails, washers and 22 bullets on the track and occasionally a penny, but not very often, because a penny in those days was good for a handful of jelly beans at Stearns & McCormick's or Bill Lafferty's stores." He continued his nostalgic picture of the



"good old days," when Bill Philipp carried a shotgun in the engine cab to shoot pheasants and the times the road borrowed coaches for special occasions. He recalled the day the gasoline "dinkey" "jumped the track near Terrill Park from the backwaters."

Chamber of Commerce, county, and city officials also participated in the program. The ceremonies ended when President Carr stepped up to the microphone and gave the final order to Engineer Frank O'Leary and Fireman Jim Dows. It read:

Train Order No. 30

Frank O'Leary  
Engineer No. 6

Proceed 1:30 P. M. — 12/1/51 on run to Oneida and return — On leaving Manchester sound whistle and bell repeatedly and let off steam. Let 'em know she is alive —

Hubert Carr  
President

Several days later No. 6 again sounded its whistle but this time pulled a train of flat cars, while workmen busily dismantled the line. "It's like putting a noose around your neck and pulling yourself up," remarked one person witnessing the dismemberment.

For the next two years Carr was busy canceling bonds at face value, hunting up stockholders, and issuing 37 per cent liquidation dividends. Meanwhile every bill had been paid in full. So



well had the dismemberment been timed and executed that the road realized \$95,000 from its rolling stock, buildings, and real estate. Among the congratulatory letters received was one from the Illinois Central. Another letter came from the head of Iowa's tiny Tama & Toledo Railroad seeking advice on how to liquidate its road in light of the masterly way the M & O had wound up its affairs.

On January 18, 1956, the local papers carried an item on the Manchester & Oneida Railway under the title "Notice Of The Dissolution Of Corporation" stating that: "all liabilities have been paid and the assets of the corporation distributed to the stockholders, and said corporation is now dissolved."

Manchester's "back door" was closed for eternity.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.